

## **AoC Response to the Trade Union 2021/22 Pay Claim**

AoC Employers' side understands the commitment that all college staff have continued to demonstrate throughout the last year in order to support students, deliver teaching and learning and help keep staff and students safe during the pandemic.

We are in full agreement with the sector's trades unions that pay in the Further Education sector remains a priority and that recent recommendations have failed to keep pace with inflation.

However, funding in the current year has not changed, and colleges are suffering the same Covid-related cost pressures as other sectors; pressures which led to a pay freeze for public sector workers in 2021/22. The outlook for both the remainder of 2021/22 and 2022/23 continues to be very challenging as a result of lower adult recruitment, loss of commercial income and steep increases in costs. We know there is likely to be a deterioration in overall financial health with more colleges finding themselves in difficulty.

*We are therefore making a pay recommendation for 2021/22 of:*

- *1%, or £250 (whichever is the greater)*
- *That the real living wage, calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, should be the minimum wage in the sector, and that those colleges who do not currently pay it should work towards its implementation as quickly as possible.*

We will also strongly recommend that those colleges who can afford to award staff more should do so, whilst we must acknowledge that some colleges may be unable to meet both aspects of the recommendation, which will be subject to local affordability.

For next year, we have a reasonable expectation that funding rates will increase. This gives cause for some optimism but future funding levels cannot be used as a basis for current year pay recommendations.

With regard to other aspects of the claim:

You have requested a review of the 2009 National Agreement on Regulating Working Hours in Further Education Colleges. We would like to suggest that we go further and that a more pragmatic approach would be to develop a set of guiding principles which also focus on staff mental health and wellbeing. This we believe is likely to have greater impact for all staff across the sector and should take account of the workload changes and working practices post-Covid.

In addition, AoC Employers' side remains committed to our national pay process. We surveyed member colleges and 68% confirmed that they had followed the pay recommendation for 2020/21. We also asked them if they were willing to be bound by the outcome of the 2021/22 NJF talks and provide the trade unions with a list of colleges that were committed to implement the outcome of negotiations before the first meeting of the NJF. The response from member colleges was that they were emphatically against this, with many citing the responsibility of governing bodies in this respect. We therefore have no mandate from our members to discuss this aspect of your claim.

It is disappointing and regrettable that the sector is yet again unable to afford a better offer. However, we believe the reasons are well understood and documented. Whilst we fully appreciate that this is not what trades unions and staff were hoping for, we believe, that it is more important than ever that we work together to ensure the future of FE.

We were surprised to receive the pay claim so late and well into the 2021/22 year. Many of our colleges have already implemented a pay award for this year and we would like to start an early dialogue with you on 2022/23. We therefore propose that we meet in March 2022 to begin our discussions about pay for 2022/23. Colleges will by then have more up to date information in relation to funding linked to 16-18 funding rates. This we believe will benefit your members as well as our members.

Gerry McDonald

Chair – Association of College Employment Policy Committee